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NOTES ON ISAIAH, CHAP. 7.

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The usual interpretation of **אם לא האמינו כי לא האמנו**, chap. 7:9b, involves some difficulties. One is a purely syntactical one, concerning the particle **כי**. Geiger found it objectionable and suggested **ב** in its place. "If ye have no confidence *in me*, ye shall not abide." Delitzsch thinks this emendation entirely unnecessary, and cites several other instances (Gen. 31:42; 43:10; Numb. 22:29, 33; 1 Sam. 14:30, 39) to prove that **כי** is here, too, in its right place. But a closer examination of the sentences cited by him shows how unlike they are to the one under consideration. In all of them **כי** introduces consequents of uncertainty or contrary to fact. But a positive threat like that which **אם לא האמנו** is here understood to convey is not preceded by this affirmative particle (*cf.* Isa. 1:20 and Deuteronomy *passim*).

Another and greater difficulty arises from the context. Isaiah comes to inspire the king with confidence and courage. He gives him the grounds for such confidence, vss. 8-9a. But his words are probably listened to with stolid indifference, if not with impatience. Are we to suppose that a prophet like Isaiah immediately loses his temper and hurls a denunciation of judgment upon his listeners? That would have put an end to his overtures, and we should look in vain for a second visit of the messenger of God to the king. But he does pay him a second visit, and even this time, when Ahaz positively rejects all offers, the prophet does not yet threaten. He only points out his wickedness (vs. 13). What more natural than that in the first interview he did the same?

Would it, then, not be more correct to translate the sentence thus: "If ye do not trust, . . . for ye are not trustworthy"? The consequent of the hypothetical clause is, for the time being, suppressed. The prophet is here to convince, not to threaten. And though at the sight of the king's hesitation a threat may force itself to the prophet's lips, he restrains himself. He gives vent

to his momentary anger by exclaiming how wicked his listeners are, as he does in the following paragraph. Similar constructions, where a clause is suppressed and a "Gedankenstrich" is to be supplied, we find in Gen. 30:27; 38:17; 50:15; Job 38:5 (with this last instance compare the verse preceding it and vs. 18 of the same chapter). If we follow the clue afforded by Gen. 50:15, we may translate it: "Ye probably do not trust; for ye are not trustworthy." For this meaning of the Niph'al of נָאֵץ, cf. Gen. 42:20; 1 Kings 8:26; Ps. 78:8, 37; 2 Chron. 1:9.

Now, as to the explanation of the sign, vss. 14-17, I think some expositors find too much in it. So Mitchell, for instance, says that this sign will be one to confound, rather than to comfort, the king who wearies God. Therefore, as the words immediately following imply the favor of Jehovah (*Emanu-el*), they cannot completely describe the sign, but the next verse must be taken with them. The sign, then, is twofold. First there will be a time of peace and deliverance, so that mothers will feel prompted by gratitude to call their children Emanu-el, or give them names of similar import. No child need actually bear this name Emanu-el. But in two or three years, when these Emanu-els will have arrived at the age of knowing the distinction between good and evil, the punishment will have come, namely, the children will have to subsist on such humble fare as curds and honey. Vss. 16-17 are then further explanations of the two phases of the sign.

The same interpretation of the sign is given by Dillmann. Delitzsch, too, sees a threat rather than a promise in it.

Now, in the first place, how can we make the plain, explicit statement, "and she shall call his name Emanu-el," so indefinite as not to mean to predict "that any child would actually bear this exact name"? And how can we say (with Duhm) that העלמה is an indefinite person, any woman? How can we tell whether חמאה ורבש refers to a calamity any more than to a blessing? In the second place, after all that has been said by the commentators we are yet entirely in the dark as to the sign itself. In what consists that sign? Let us not forget what such a sign offered by a prophet means. When a prophet predicts or demands something which the addressed ones refuse to comply with or to believe, the prophet, in order to show them the power and authority vested in him, either performs something marvelous

before their very eyes, like the *ôthôth* Moses performs before the people to inspire them with faith, or like the *ôth* Isaiah offers Hezekiah during the latter's sickness (*cf.* Isa. 38:7, 8); or predicts something that will occur in the meantime. When the prediction concerning the proximate event proves true, they are induced to believe that that concerning the ultimate event will also prove true. Such is the *ôth* with which God engenders faith in Moses. He tells him: "When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain" (Exod. 3:12). And such *ôthôth* Samuel gives Saul (*cf.* 1 Sam. 10:7).

What, then, is the *ôth* Isaiah here offers? Nothing else than that "the child to which the young woman (a person well known to his hearers) is soon to give birth will be a son."

Now, like every other sign in the Old Testament, this one, too, is necessarily in confirmation of a promise. A threat cannot yet be thought of. For again I must ask: Why should Isaiah immediately threaten? Is it because the king refuses a token that God will wreak such vengeance upon him? This is absurd. True, the prophet is indignant at the king's refusal. But he is not so indignant as to lose control of himself and to forget the purpose of his meeting with Ahaz, namely, to dissuade him from invoking Assyria's help. To his indignation he gives vent in vs. 13. As the king refuses to ask a token, the prophet simply states that God will give him one unsolicited (הוֹיָא). When this prediction concerning the birth of a son proves true, then, the prophet adds, the young woman will confidently call him Emanu-el, for the people will be convinced that the former prediction, לֹא חָקוּם וְלֹא תְהִיָּה, will also prove true. Let Ahaz, then, wait for the fulfilment of this token, but let him by no means appeal to Assyria. If, however, he does not wait, but carries out his suicidal policy of casting himself for help upon Assyria (which hypothetical clause has unfortunately dropped out of our text), "the Lord shall bring upon thee and upon thy people . . . even the king of Assyria." That a connecting link between vss. 16 and 17 is missing will be admitted by all. (*Cf.* LXX *ad loc.*)

The difficulty that still remains is about vs. 15. But the best we can do is to consider it a late gloss, for which we have good authority: Hitzig, Reuss, Stade, Duhm, Cheyne.